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ABSTRACT

The Resolving Conflict Creatively Program (RCCP) is one of a growing number of grade K-12 violence prevention programs that teaches young people how to resolve conflict peacefully. It is a school-based program taught by regular classroom teachers. This report was designed to introduce criminal justice professionals to the basic concepts and strategies of violence prevention and to inspire their involvement in finding new ways to prevent violent crime among youth. RCCP includes elementary, secondary, and special education curriculums, a student-led mediation program, a parents' program, and an administrators' component. RCCP focuses on all students, not just high-risk youth. Teachers are given professional training and ongoing technical assistance and support throughout the school year. This paper describes the program's philosophy and details the 12 units in the elementary curriculum as well as the 3 unitss in the secondary program. Other areas discussed include professional training, the student mediation program, mediator selection and training, parent training, program costs, and evaluation results. The report closes with a special note for criminal justice professionals and the violence prevention movement. Community programs in four different locales are discussed. Addresses for further information are provided. (RJM)

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Program Focus

ED 379 562

Building the Peace:

The Resolving Conflict Creatively Program (RCCP)

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Building the Peace: The Resolving Conflict Creatively Program (RCCP)

by William DeJong

A New York City Program Teaches Children the Basics of Nonviolent Conflict Resolution

For Linda Lantieri, coordinator for New York City's Resolving Conflict Creatively Program (RCCP),[1] the spring of 1992 brought devastating news. Henry Rivera, a long-time RCCP teacher from Harlem's School for Career Development, was killed while trying to prevent a holdup of a Bronx laundromat. According to the news reports, the 71-year-old laundromat owner claimed that Rivera had saved his life. Those who knew this inspirational teacher were not surprised, for Rivera's entire career, indeed, his entire life,

The ultimate goal of our criminal justice system is to prevent crime and violence. Traditionally, criminal justice professionals have pursued this goal through the arrest, conviction, and punishment of criminal offenders, both to incapacitate those individuals and to deter others from crime.

The enforcement of our criminal codes is the cornerstone of a just and orderly society. It is apparent, however, that substantial reductions in crime and violence will come about only if police and other criminal justice professionals broaden their charge to include nontraditional crime prevention strategies and work in partnership with the communities they serve.

A move toward community-oriented policing began in the 1970's with community crime prevention, with law enforcement officers helping citizens form neighborhood watches and citizen patrols. In the 1980's, as the drug trade continued to flourish, law enforcement agencies took the initiative to form partnerships with schools to establish drug prevention education programs such as Project DARE (Drug Abuse Resistance Education).

The 1990's present us with a new tribulation: the rise of violent crime among our children. To meet this challenge, criminal justice professionals must join with teachers, youth workers, clergy, and other community leaders to convince young people that nonviolence is the wisest course and to teach them the conflict resolution skills they need to survive.

This *Program Focus* introduces the basic concepts and strategies of violence prevention through an examination of the Resolving Conflict Creatively Program (RCCP) in New York City. RCCP, a school-based program taught by regular classroom teachers, was selected for presentation after an exhaustive review of school-based programs across the country.

Inspired by RCCP and other programs, criminal justice professionals recently have started to explore how they might contribute to preventing violence among youth. Project DARE in Los Angeles, for example, expanded its high school curriculum to include lessons on violence prevention. In Houston, the police department assigned full-time officers to run a year-round recreational program for high-risk teens, which gives the officers a chance to talk to these youths about their lives, the interpersonal conflicts they encounter, and how they can channel their anger.

These efforts are a good beginning, but they are just that—a beginning. The National Institute of Justice looks forward to continuing its work in facilitating this exciting new era in community-oriented policing.

Jeremy Travis
Director
National Institute of Justice

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had been committed to the cause of peace.

Lantieri worried that Rivera's death might lead his students to question the value of RCCP, if they concluded that the program's message of nonviolence, empowerment, and hope was no match for the ugly but routine violence that surrounded them. However, giving in to despair is not Lantieri's style. Although Rivera's death was a heart-rending reminder of how far RCCP must still go in changing the climate of violence that pervades New York City, Lantieri also remembers how far she and her colleagues have come in just a few years.

* * *

Traditionally, our criminal justice system has focused on reducing crime through incapacitation and deterrence. A tripling of the average prison time served per violent crime between 1975 and 1989 caused a dramatic increase in our Nation's prison population. Even so, this did not lead to a decrease in serious violent crime, especially among youth.

The need for additional approaches to preventing violent crime is clear. We need a broader focus, one that seeks to alter the climate of violence that pervades our Nation's cities. To accomplish this, we need to change the attitudes, beliefs, and expectations that feed that climate, and we need to teach young people how to resolve conflict without violence. All elements of our communities must be involved in this effort, including criminal justice professionals.

The Resolving Conflict Creatively Program is one of a growing number of violence prevention programs that teach young people how to resolve conflict peacefully, what some educators now call the fourth *R*. RCCP, a school-based program taught by regular classroom teachers, is jointly sponsored by the New York City Public Schools and Educators for Social Responsibility–Metro (ESR), a nonprofit organization dedicated to conflict resolution and multicultural education.

Through an examination of RCCP, this *Program Focus* is designed to introduce criminal justice professionals to the basic concepts and strategies of violence prevention and to inspire their involvement in finding new ways to prevent violent crime among youth. Although RCCP has not yet involved police or other criminal justice professionals, there exists no better program from which to learn or find inspiration.

Started in 1985, RCCP is widely regarded by public health experts as one of the most promising violence prevention programs now in operation. What most distinguishes RCCP from other prevention programs is its focus on creating school change. This means that management of both individual classrooms and the school as a whole is consistent with a value system of nonviolence. And it means that students have a safe environment in which to explore peaceful ways of resolving conflict.

This grade K–12 program is also remarkable for the comprehensiveness of its approach, which includes elementary, secondary, and special education curriculums, a student-led mediation program, a parents' program, and an administrators' component. RCCP's focus is not only on high-risk students but on all youth. Moreover, teachers are given professional training and ongoing technical assistance and support throughout the school year. The program is now reaching 70,000 students in 180 schools citywide.

Program Philosophy

The Nature of Conflict

RCCP and other violence prevention programs are based on the premise that human aggression is a learned behavior, taught through example and reinforced by a culture that glamorizes violent responses to conflict. Conflict itself, with its roots in competition, poor communication, and miscalculation, is a normal part of life and cannot be eliminated. What must change, therefore, is how we respond to it. Accordingly, we must teach our children that violence is not an acceptable means of resolving conflict. We must also teach them the skills they need to handle conflict nonviolently, including perspective taking, cost-benefit analysis, decision making, and negotiation.

A frequent misconception is that RCCP teaches kids to deal with conflict passively, to walk away from it. Clearly, there are times when walking away is necessary to escape physical danger. In general, however, avoidance is not the answer. In most cases, conflict should be dealt with head-on, with a focus on constructive problem solving. At the same time, RCCP recognizes that not all conflict can be resolved. In some cases, force, even physical force, must be used, but only after all other means of dealing with the underlying problem have been exhausted. RCCP students are taught that conflict can lead to violence but that it does not have to do so inevitably.

A Focus on School Change

RCCP is unique in its focus on creating school change, a mission consistent with the

philosophy of Educators for Social Responsibility–Metro, which states that conflict resolution "is best taught in the context of a caring community characterized by cooperation, effective communication, emotional strength, appreciation of differences, recognition of common purposes, and shared decision making." For this reason, RCCP's leadership argues that their program requires a buy-in at the highest levels within the school system.

By creating a "peaceable school," a safe environment where students are encouraged to experiment with peaceful ways of resolving conflict, RCCP teachers strive to give their students a new image of what their world can be. For this to happen, however, the teachers themselves must change. They must learn and then apply a new set of skills for heading off and resolving conflict. Even more difficult, they must adopt a new style of classroom management, one that fundamentally involves a sharing of power with students so that they can learn how to deal with their own disputes.

A Focus on Appreciating Diversity

Sometimes the conflict that results in violence has its roots in racism and prejudice. Educators must take this problem seriously, for they must prepare young people not only for the world of work but also for getting along in a pluralistic society.

RCCP also seeks to abate racism and other causes of violence through lessons on "multicultural appreciation" and "bias awareness." Teachers help their students become aware of their prejudices and recognize that stereotypes are based on inaccurate or incomplete information. Differences among people are acknowledged, but RCCP urges that they be seen as a cause for celebration rather than as an excuse for prejudice.

Most important, RCCP seeks to foster a classroom climate in which students are affirmed and respected for who they are. RCCP staff work with teachers to create what they call a multicultural classroom, where teachers make a special point of identifying and celebrating the different racial and ethnic heritages of their students. In such a classroom, expressions of racial or ethnic bias are not tolerated. Teachers stay alert to spontaneous comments or actions that seem motivated by bias, which provides opportunities for teaching about the workings of prejudice.

Conflict Resolution Curriculum

Mark, a fifth-grader, talked to his RCCP classmates about how angry he was with his brother a few weeks ago, so angry that he hit him. "You hit your brother?" a shocked classmate asked. "Yes," Mark replied, "but that was before we got to the chapter called 'Dealing Appropriately With Feelings.'" "Oh, that's different," the classmate agreed.[2]

* * *

The RCCP curriculum stresses the modeling of nonviolent alternatives for dealing with conflict, teaching negotiation and other conflict resolution skills, and demonstrating to students that they can "play a powerful role in creating a more peaceful world."

Accordingly, RCCP concentrates on teaching several key component skills: active listening, assertiveness (as opposed to aggressiveness or passivity), expressing feelings, perspective taking, cooperation, negotiation, and how to interrupt expressions of bias. Learning these skills requires weekly practice, so teachers are encouraged to do at least one "peace lesson" a week, to use "teachable moments" that arise because of events in the classroom or the world at large, and to "infuse" conflict resolution lessons into the regular academic program.

RCCP lessons involve role-playing, interviewing, group dialogue, brainstorming, and other experiential learning strategies, all of which require a high degree of student participation and interaction. Use of the curriculum requires teachers to relinquish some control over what happens in their classroom. Because many teachers are uncomfortable with this, at least at first, RCCP provides continuing consultation and support during the school year.

These curricula require strong verbal skills, so several adjustments are necessary to accommodate the variety of cognitive and communications abilities of special needs students. With that in mind, a new RCCP curriculum for special needs students breaks the lessons into smaller steps and makes greater use of visual and kinesthetic learning modalities (for example, art, mime, and nonverbal communication).

Elementary School Curriculum

RCCP's newly revised elementary school curriculum is built around 51 lessons called workshops, a term that calls attention to the fact that the teacher acts as a facilitator, leading students through a series of experiential learning activities. Each lesson has the same structure: (1) warm-up exercise ("gathering"), (2) review of the class agenda, (3) workshop activities, (4) student evaluation

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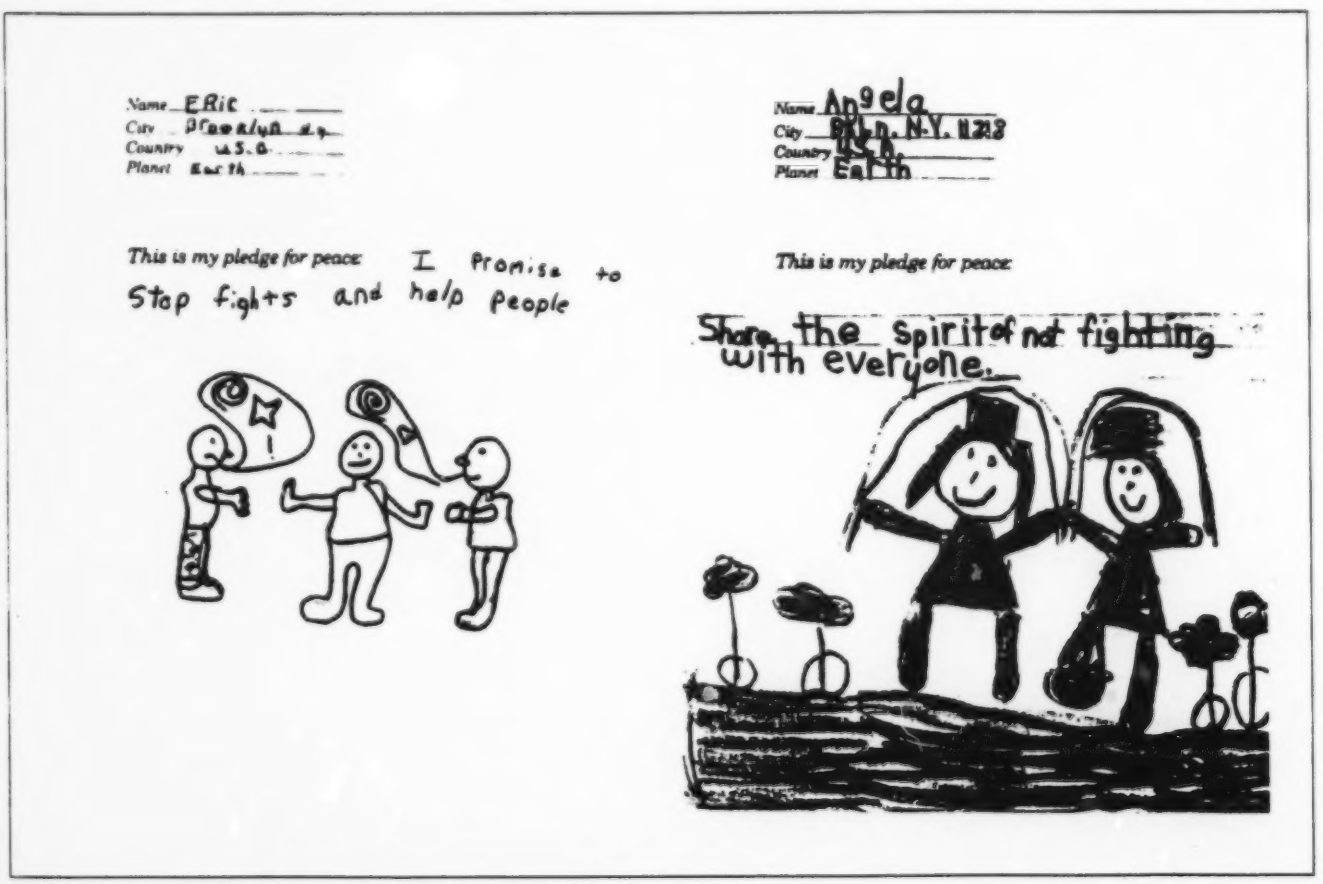
of the workshop, and (5) closing activity. The curriculum, which is divided into 12 units, presents separate lessons for grades K–3 and 4–6.

Unit 1: Setting the Stage. The first unit helps build a classroom environment of mutual caring and respect, where all members are included and valued. Individual workshops focus on ground rules for speaking and listening, the components of good listening skills, the impact of put-downs and "put-ups" on self-esteem, and accepting differences of opinion.

Unit 2: Peace and Conflict. In the second unit, the curriculum helps children see that they, like all of us, "have the power and responsibility to be peacemakers." The unit begins by introducing key concepts. Peace is not the mere absence of excitement but a dynamic time of action, accomplishment, and close human relationships. Conflict is a natural part of everyone's life and can be either constructive or destructive, depending on how it is handled.

Unit 3: Communication. The third unit teaches students that good communication is the key to both preventing and resolving conflict. Workshops focus on the basic steps of the communication process, the role of misunderstandings in creating conflict, and the importance of understanding another person's point of view. The last workshop in this unit introduces the skill of active listening, which entails several techniques: asking questions, reflecting the speaker's feelings, paraphrasing what the speaker says, and showing understanding for another's perspective.


Name Erik
City Brooklyn N.Y.
Country U.S.A.
Planet Earth
This is my pledge for peace: I Promise to Stop fights and help people
Name Angela
City Bklyn. N.Y. 11213
Country U.S.A.
Planet Earth
This is my pledge for peace:
Share the spirit of not fighting with everyone.

Unit 4: Affirmation. The fourth unit features classroom activities that remind students of their own good qualities and help them appreciate and acknowledge those qualities in others. For example, students in grades K–3 create a book about themselves, with an illustrated cover and various "affirmation pages" that depict a game they are good at, something they do to help another person, and so on.

Unit 5: Cooperation. The fifth unit introduces the concepts and skills of cooperation through a set of experiential activities. In one workshop, for example, K–3 students work in small groups to create an imaginary monster, and those in grades 4–6 work in groups to create a pantomime of some type of machine, such as a clothes dryer. Students learn that working cooperatively toward a common purpose can reduce the opportunities for conflict and that if a conflict does arise, a history of cooperation can facilitate the search for a "win-win" resolution.

Unit 6: Acknowledging Feelings. The sixth unit introduces two important skills in conflict resolution: (1) recognizing one's own feelings and telling others about them and (2) acknowledging, accepting, and empathizing with the feelings of others. Feelings of anger are a special focus. Typical responses to our feelings of anger—aggression and avoidance—do nothing to resolve the underlying conflict.

Being assertive—that is, standing up for oneself without hurting the other person—is presented as a constructive alternative. Students in grades 4–6 learn how to use "I messages," a method of communicating feelings and thoughts that avoids criticizing or blaming others (for example, "I feel angry when you don't listen, because it makes me think that what I am saying is not important to you").

Figure 1

Hints for De-Escalating a Conflict

1. Take a deep breath to stay relaxed.
2. Look the other person in the eye, with both of you sitting or standing.
3. Speak softly and slowly.
4. Keep your legs and arms uncrossed. Do not clench your fists or purse your lips.
5. Keep reminding yourself:, "We *can* find a win-win resolution to this," and remind the other person of this too.
6. If necessary, ask for a break to collect your thoughts or release pent-up tension.
7. Give "I messages."
8. Paraphrase what the other person has said, asking for clarification as necessary.
9. Watch your language. Words that escalate a conflict are *never*, *always*, *unless*, *can't*, *won't*, *don't*, *should*, and *shouldn't*. Words that de-escalate a conflict are *maybe*, *perhaps*, *sometimes*, *what if*, *it seems like*, *I feel*, *I think*, and *I wonder*.
10. Really listen to what the other person is saying, with the goal of truly understanding that person's point of view.
11. Affirm and acknowledge the other person's position.
12. Ask questions that encourage the other person to look for a solution. Ask open-ended questions rather than ones that will evoke a yes or no response.
13. Keep looking for alternative ideas to resolve your dispute so that both of you have your needs met.

Unit 7: Resolving Conflict Creatively. In the seventh unit students learn specific skills needed for a problem-solving approach to conflict (see figure 1). Workshops for grades 4–6 focus on the techniques of win-win negotiation and mediation, both of which involve active listening, "I messages," and creative questioning. Workshops for grades K–3 lay the groundwork for teaching negotiation and mediation skills when the students are older. In all grades, the workshops are structured to let students practice these new skills and get constructive feedback.

Unit 8: Appreciating Diversity. The eighth unit is the first of a three-part sequence of lessons that focuses on issues of diversity and prejudice. It begins with students exploring the attributes they have in common with others in the class and those that are different. Students in grades 3–6 discover that even superficially similar objects, like pieces of fruit or peanuts, are not uniform. Difference is a constant in nature.

From this generalization, the unit moves on to explore differences among people in more depth. Students in grades K–2 look at the different kinds of games people play and differences in family composition. Students in grades 3–6 list similarities and differences

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among people and discuss both what is good and what is difficult about such differences.

Unit 9: Bias Awareness. The ninth unit provides students with a conceptual framework for understanding the difference between preference and prejudice. Students in grades K–2 begin a book called *It Isn't Fair!* in which they describe injustices related to prejudice. Students in grades 3–6 start out with a simulation game in which treats are arbitrarily distributed, with some students getting more than others. They then use their problem-solving skills to search for a more equitable distribution system.

Unit 10: Countering Bias. In the tenth unit, students investigate ways in which they can intervene to stop discriminatory behavior. Through role-plays, the students explore how prejudice and discrimination present themselves in their lives. They practice developing and using active listening, "I messages," and other strategies for countering acts of discrimination by others.

Unit 11: Peacemakers. The peacemakers celebrates people currently working for peace as well as those who have made important contributions in the past. For example, students in grades 3–6 identify characters they admire in books, television, and movies and discuss to what extent these characters exhibit the attributes of peacemakers. In another lesson, they identify several organizations that work for peace and describe their activities.

Unit 12: The Future—A Positive Vision. The last unit focuses on discussing students' concerns about the future, investigating controversial issues, and envisioning a promising future in which the students will play an active role. In one activity, students read aloud and discuss the "I Have a Dream" speech by Martin Luther King, Jr. They then make lists of their dreams for the future and create images of themselves making a better world.

Courtesy of Peter Barton

RCCP Director Linda Lantieri gives feedback to student mediators at New York City's P.S. 75.

Secondary School Curriculum

The secondary school curriculum covers material similar to that of the elementary school curriculum but with an additional focus on ways of de-escalating volatile situations that might lead to violent confrontations. The lessons are divided into three major units.

Unit 1: Engaging the Students. The lessons in the first unit introduce norms for classroom conduct that will promote an atmosphere of mutual respect. The lessons also review the concept of negotiation and help students see the relevance of conflict resolution in their daily lives.

Unit 2: Concepts and Skills of Conflict Resolution. The second unit, using simulations and role-plays, covers a wide range of topics: the vocabulary of conflict resolution; messages received from parents, friends, and the media about conflict; the rules of "fair fighting"; and basic skills essential to successful negotiation, including active listening, perspective taking, the use of "I messages," and brainstorming. This unit also helps students understand how differences in point of view affect people's interpretations of a conflict situation, the importance of cooling off periods, and the need to move beyond stated positions to the disputants' underlying needs.

Unit 3: Concepts and Skills of Intergroup Relations and Bias Awareness. Students explore commonalities and differences between their family's values and those of their classmates' families. Several basic concepts are introduced, including stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination. Students reflect on their own experiences, especially how they

have been hurt and how they have hurt others. They then consider what they can do as individuals to resist prejudice and discrimination, such as interrupting racially biased statements by others.

Professional Training

During a faculty meeting, the principal turned to Mrs. Baker, who had participated the previous year in RCCP. "Could you give us an idea of how you benefited from being part of RCCP last year?" he asked. "Oh, it's very simple," she responded. "It saved my marriage."

* * *

RCCP uses both formal training sessions and one-on-one work to teach regular classroom teachers how to present the conflict resolution curriculum. Equally important, the teachers are led to reexamine how they handle conflict in their own lives, particularly in their relationships with students. With a strong commitment from the principal to make the school violence-free and with changes in the teachers' style of classroom management, students are provided a safe environment in which to work on their emerging conflict resolution skills.

RCCP instructors provide 20 hours of introductory training in a series of after-school sessions. The training presents the RCCP philosophy and the curriculum; teaches communication, conflict resolution, and intergroup relations skills; and demonstrates "infusion" strategies for integrating these concepts and skills into social studies, language arts, and other academic subjects.

Training also covers teaching techniques, in particular the use of role-playing, interviewing, group dialogue, brainstorming, and other experiential approaches. The teachers are also encouraged to utilize cooperative learning groups, assigning teams of students to study, work on projects, and learn together. Such teams can be used to provide diverse groups of students with a common purpose, which can lead to new friendships and a reduction of prejudice.

A key to RCCP's success is the follow-up support that teachers receive. Each new teacher is assigned to an RCCP staff developer, who visits between 6 and 10 times a year, giving demonstration lessons, helping the teacher prepare, observing classes, giving feedback, and sustaining the teacher's motivation. In addition, the staff developer convenes bimonthly follow-up meetings after school so that the teachers can receive additional training, share their experiences, discuss concerns, and plan schoolwide events. During a teacher's second year, the staff developer visits only two or three times.

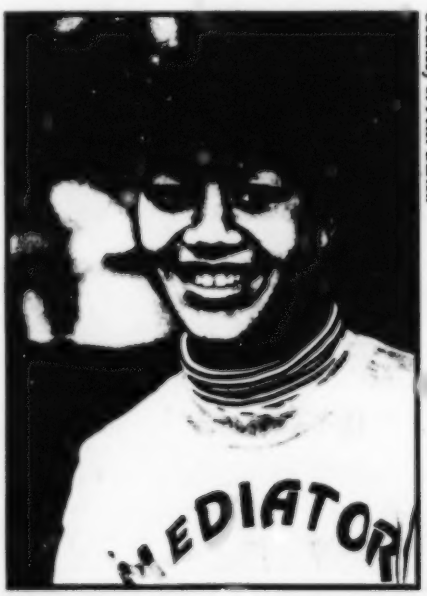
Student Mediation Program

When Yvette showed up at Sandra's apartment building one Saturday with a knife and several friends to back her up, it was clear that the conflict between them had spun out of control. Word of the incident spread quickly, and on Monday two of the high school's RCCP-trained peer mediators intervened. After a two-hour session, the girls worked through their problem, which they learned was due to a misunderstanding that had been deliberately created by a mutual "friend."

* * *

The student mediation program, a key component of RCCP's plan for school change, provides strong peer models for nonviolent conflict resolution and reinforces students' emerging skills in working out their problems. Ultimately, by reducing the number of fights between students, it can contribute to a more peaceful school climate. Student mediation is not a substitute for an effective school discipline policy, for if strictly enforced sanctions against fighting are not in place, students are unlikely to turn to the mediators for help.

RCCP embraces the concept of "principled negotiation" outlined by Fisher and Ury in their best-seller *Getting to Yes*.[3] With this approach, mediation is not a contest of wills to see whose position will prevail but an opportunity for mutual problem solving. The ultimate goal of mediation is not to force one



Courtesy of Peter Barton

Helping others as a peer mediator is a boost to students' self-esteem.

of the parties to give up something or to find a way of "splitting the difference" but to forge a win-win solution that meets the underlying interests and needs of both parties. Figure 2 lists the steps used by RCCP's student mediators.

RCCP initiates this program only in schools that have participated in RCCP for a year or more and have at least a small group of teachers who regularly use the curriculum. As explained by ESR, "School mediation programs are best implemented as part of a larger effort to train staff and students in conflict resolution." This is a significant strength over mediation-only projects elsewhere in the country.

Adopting this approach means that teachers and school administrators must give up some control, for with mediation, solutions are suggested but never imposed. For that reason, new programs sometimes meet resistance from faculty who are concerned about students' being able to handle the responsibility. But according to RCCP staff, once these teachers see the program in action, they are won over.

Although the mediation program is an important part of RCCP's approach, funding

Figure 2

RCCP Student Meditation Program: Steps for a Successful Mediation

Introduction

1. Introduce yourselves as mediators.
2. Ask those in the conflict whether they would like a mediator to help solve the problem.
3. Find a quiet area near the playground or lunchroom where the mediation can be held away from other students.
4. Ask for agreement to the following rules:
   (a) They will try to solve the problem.
   (b) There will be no name-calling.
   (c) They will take turns talking with out interrupting.
5. Pledge to keep everything they say confidential.

Listening

6. Ask the first person what happened. Paraphrase.
7. Ask the first person how he or she feels. Reflect those feelings.
8. Ask the second person what happened. Paraphrase.
9. Ask the second person how she or he feels. Reflect those feelings.

Looking for Solutions

10. Ask the first person what he or she could have done differently. Paraphrase.
11. Ask the second person what she or he could have done differently. Paraphrase.
12. Ask the first person what he or she can do right now to help solve the problem. Paraphrase.
13. Ask the second person what she or he can do right now. Paraphrase.
14. Use creative questioning to bring the disputants closer to a solution.

Finding a Resolution

Note: A good resolution is one that solves the problem, perhaps for good. It is specific, answering questions of who, where, when, and how. It is balanced, with both disputants having the responsibility to make it work.

15. Help both disputants find a solution they feel good about. (As a last resort, the mediator can offer solutions for the disputants to consider, but this is not preferred.)
16. Repeat the solution and all of its parts, and ask if each disputant agrees to it.
17. Congratulate both students on a successful mediation.
18. Fill out the mediation report form.

10

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limitations have prevented its widespread implementation. RCCP estimates an average cost of $10,000 per year to run a school mediation program, which covers training of faculty coordinators, faculty time for supervision and support, ongoing consultation by RCCP staff, and various supplies, including T-shirts for mediators. RCCP added mediation programs in four additional schools during 1992–1993, bringing the total to 1 secondary school and 13 elementary school programs.

The Mediation Program in Action

In elementary schools, the mediators are on duty during the lunchtime recess, easily identified by the mediator T-shirt they wear over their regular clothes. Working in pairs, the mediators are vigilant for any fights that break out. They approach the disputants and ask if they want mediation. If the students consent (and most do), the mediators take them to a quiet area of the playground to talk.

The mediators do not try to break up physical fights. That is left to the teacher or parent supervisor on duty, who can then decide whether the disputants would benefit from working with a team of mediators. No referral is made if the fight is dangerous or if it seems to involve emotional issues beyond the mediators' skills.

In secondary schools, the mediators work in pairs, acting on referrals they receive from faculty or students. Mediations are typically conducted during lunch hours in a room set aside for that purpose. On occasion, however, mediators are called out of class to conduct a session that cannot be postponed.

Each school has a faculty coordinator who monitors the program, conducts biweekly meetings, and gives advice and feedback to the mediators. The coordinators receive two days of training, with the primary emphasis on coached practice in mediation. Some elementary programs also hire parents to supervise the playgrounds during lunch hours.

When the mediation program is implemented, the faculty coordinator must play an active role in educating everyone about the program and encouraging referrals. Indeed, most of the early referrals come from the coordinator. As the program grows in acceptance, other faculty and staff begin making referrals; the mediators feel comfortable approaching disputants to ask if they want help; and the disputants themselves seek out mediation.

Mediator Selection and Training

To launch a new program, RCCP initially trains about 25 to 35 student mediators. Schools have established various procedures for selecting the mediators. In some schools, for example, students nominate their classmates by secret ballot, and teachers pick from among the top vote-getters. In others, interested students complete an application form. Whatever method is used, the mediators are selected to represent a cross-section of the student body, defined by gender, race, class, achievement level, and placement (for example, special education).

The selected mediators also include a mix of "negative" and "positive" student leaders. One of the primary outcomes of the program is to increase the mediators' self-esteem. The hope is that carefully selected at-risk youth will be moved through their involvement in the program to turn their leadership talents to constructive purposes. An evaluation of the mediation program shows that this hope is being realized.

The mediator training is rigorous, lasting three full days. Being a mediator is a tough job and requires mastery of several complex skills: active listening, reflecting feelings, paraphrasing each disputant's position, and asking creative questions to help the parties forge a mutually agreeable solution. Also critical is the ability to recognize what the parties agree on and what remains to be settled, and to differentiate between what the parties say they want and what their underlying needs are. Through all this, the media-

NIJ Awards Grant to NYC Victim Services Agency to Study Middle School Conflict Resolution Programs

With funding from the National Institute of Justice, the New York City Victim Services Agency is conducting a research study of two types of middle-school conflict resolution programs. The first type is a "traditional" program that includes a 25-lesson classroom curriculum and peer mediation. The second type includes those approaches but adds a victimization curriculum, a counseling component, and a schoolwide antiviolence campaign. Teacher training is provided by RCCP. The relative impact of these programs will be assessed by measuring changes in students' knowledge, attitudes, skills, and self-reported behavior.

For further information, contact

Tonya Bannister
Victims Services Agency
2 Lafayette Street
New York, NY 10007
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tors have to avoid taking sides, even if one of the parties seems especially upset and even if one of the parties is a friend.

To become certified, the mediators must demonstrate their new skills in a role-played conflict, showing both a working knowledge of the mediation process and an ability to improvise. They must also pledge to use their new skills to solve their own problems instead of getting into fights. The mediators then receive a certificate at a special graduation ceremony, which can be held at either a school assembly or a private function with friends and relatives.

Because becoming a good mediator requires practice, day-to-day coaching by the faculty coordinator is essential. There are also biweekly meetings to provide ongoing training, troubleshoot problems, review difficult cases, maintain a sense of community among the mediators, and help build up their morale. At these meetings, the coordinator also reviews the mediators' written reports.

Parent Training

A student mediator talked about how her parents squabble, usually over silly things. "That's what was happening last Saturday, so I decided to use my skills," she explained. "So you listened to your parents?" an RCCP staff developer asked. "No, I actually had to do a formal mediation. I told them the rules, I paraphrased what each said, and they were able to come up with a solution they both could live with."

* * *

No one would disagree that parents and teachers should work together to teach children how to resolve conflict nonviolently. The reason is clear: if students are to use their emerging conflict resolution skills outside of school, they must have family support. The problem in bringing parents into the process is equally clear. It is not that parents actively resist a message of nonviolence, though some might do so. Rather, it is that parents who are busy making a living and raising a family have difficulty finding the time to be involved.

As RCCP looks to the future, parent education will be a top priority. RCCP staff recently launched a Parent Involvement Program, which they piloted and are slowly expanding in Community School District 15 in Brooklyn, where RCCP began. With this program, a team of two or three parents per school is trained for 60 hours to lead workshops for other parents on intergroup relations, family communication, and conflict resolution. During the first year, 1990–1991, teams from 11 elementary schools subsequently led 20 workshops for other parents. To date, nearly 300 parents have received training.

Program Costs

RCCP annually costs just over $33 per student, including staff salaries and training stipends. To educators accustomed to buying packaged curriculums that sell for a few hundred dollars, this might seem expensive.[4] It should be remembered, however, that RCCP is much more than a curriculum. It is also an intensive program of school change, with a strong emphasis on teacher training and professional development. For this reason, RCCP requires a buy-in at the highest levels within the school system before approaching individual principals and teachers.

Evaluation

Metis Associates, Inc., has conducted several evaluations of the RCCP program. Uniformly, these evaluations have shown high enthusiasm among RCCP teachers, who have reported decreases in name-calling and physical violence among their students. One teacher explained:

> It's taught [my students] that there are other ways to resolve their conflicts besides fighting and being nasty. It's showed them how to cooperate, what friendship really means, and the value of working together as a group to achieve common goals.

Student achievement tests have confirmed this view, showing that most RCCP students learn the key concepts of conflict resolution and are able to apply them when responding to hypothetical conflicts. In addition, the RCCP students themselves have reported having fewer fights and engaging less frequently in name-calling compared with a matched control group.

The teachers report that they have changed too. In one recent study, roughly 9 out of 10 said they had an improved understanding of children's needs and were now more willing to let students take responsibility for solving their own conflicts. Many also said they had applied their increased knowledge of conflict resolution techniques in their personal lives.

The mediation program in five schools was evaluated during the 1988–1989 school year. With an average of 107 successful mediations per school, fully 89 percent of the teachers agreed that the mediation program had helped students take more responsibility for solving their own problems. Over 80

percent of both teachers and students said that students had been helped through their contact with the mediators.

The student mediators benefited too. Eighty-four percent agreed that the mediation process helped them understand people with different views. Many felt it helped them in their own lives. For some students, their involvement has been nothing less than a conversion experience, changing them from schoolyard bully to peacemaker.

RCCP should be applauded for undertaking an evaluation of its program, an unusual step among school-based violence prevention programs. Even so, the staff recognizes that further research is needed to focus on the program's impact on behavior, using more rigorous evaluation designs and measures of actual behavior. An evaluation funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention is now under way.

Criminal Justice Professionals and the Violence Prevention Movement

The idea that criminal justice professionals, especially police, should be involved in violence prevention is consistent with contemporary notions of problem-oriented and community policing. By definition, community policing is focused on broad-based, long-term solutions to crime problems and requires the enlistment of community help in developing those solutions. In fact, in several experiments now under way police are taking a leadership role in violence prevention. These experiments are reviewed below.

Although RCCP has not yet involved police or other criminal justice professionals, it is easy to imagine how their participation could enhance the program, perhaps by presenting special classes or assemblies, training and supervising the peer mediators, or training parents. As with DARE, a chief advantage of their involvement would be the authority and expertise that they would bring to the subject, especially as perceived by the students.

Police officers could also help with teacher training and technical assistance by modeling lessons, coaching the teachers, and illustrating how to manage conflict among the students. The officers could also be a conduit for sharing ideas and techniques among teachers who do not have a chance to meet with one another or to observe each other's classes.

School-Based Programs

The Los Angeles DARE program expanded its high school curriculum to include lessons related to violence prevention. Many of these lessons overlap with those found in the RCCP curriculum.

For example, one lesson focuses on anger management techniques and ways of resolving anger without resorting to violence or substance use. Anger management, the students learn, involves four sets of skills: (1) using deep breathing, self-instruction ("self-talk"), and other techniques to maintain control; (2) communicating feelings assertively by using "I messages;" (3) channeling feelings of anger and stress into constructive activities (for example, athletics, music, and art); and (4) directly confronting an anger-provoking situation by negotiating a nonviolent, win-win solution.

In another lesson, students videotape role-plays of conflicts. On the first day of the lesson, the students act out the role-plays as written, with the conflicts escalating to the brink of violence. On the second day, they act out the same role-plays, this time using a strategy that avoids violence, such as humor, apologizing, and negotiating a win-win solution to the conflict.

This expansion of the DARE high school curriculum is a useful beginning, but a more extensive program is needed so that students can get the practice they need to master the complex skills involved in nonviolent conflict resolution. Students can also benefit from an ancillary peer mediation program.

In addition, students need to begin learning these skills when they are younger, well before high school. DARE's central curriculum focuses on grades 5 and 6, the so-called exit grades prior to junior high school. Expanding these DARE lessons to include violence prevention skills can be an important step.

Finally, the regular classroom teachers need to learn how to support a transfer of training from the lessons to the children's everyday conduct. As shown by RCCP, school-based programs should do more than present lessons on conflict resolution; their objective should be nothing less than to create school change. DARE officers need to work with the teachers to make this happen.

Community-Based Programs

Community policing programs offer many opportunities for police and other criminal justice officials to be involved in community-based violence prevention. Going beyond a traditional volunteer role, several police departments have begun to assign officers to run sports and recreation programs and to work one-on-one with at-risk youths as tutors or mentors. Through such

programs, the officers can help young people learn anger management, conflict resolution, and other "life skills." They can guide them toward more thoughtful life choices, and they can simply be there to listen.

Boston, Massachusetts. As part of its neighborhood policing strategy, the Boston Police Department recently announced the deployment of 10 youth services officers, 1 for each of the city's 10 police districts. All 10 officers had volunteered for the position. With 112 hours of training behind them, the officers' job is to reach out to young people by serving as positive role models, speaking against drugs in fifth-grade classes, and referring high-risk youths to public and private social services agencies. The officers are also expected to develop their own after-school and weekend programs for elementary- and middle-school children. Extra hours, without overtime compensation, are considered part of the job.

Columbia, South Carolina. The Columbia Police Department operates substations at several city housing projects. Over time, the substations have emerged as a nexus for a variety of activities that enhance the life of the community. Officers participate in youth athletic activities, make school visits, and cosponsor social activities such as camping trips, community talent shows, dances, movie matinees, and puppet shows. The officers also serve as mentors, taking special interest in the children and their school work.

Houston, Texas. The Police Activities League (PAL) is another notable law enforcement program that could incorporate the teaching of anger management and conflict resolution skills. Presently, there are more than 500 PAL programs nationally, serving in excess of 3 million youths. In Houston, the police department assigned four full-time officers to run a year-round PAL program for high-risk youths aged 12–17 from inner-city communities. In addition to sports, the program also features numerous educational field trips and community service projects such as neighborhood clean-ups. Parents help out as assistants to the officers. Currently, the program serves 700 to 900 youth per year.

The key to the program is day-to-day, one-on-one interaction between the officers and the participants. As one officer explained, the officers serve as positive role models, and at the same time the kids get to know them as human beings, not just as police officers. According to the project's leadership, sports are the magnet to attract the youths. Then, as part of the program, the officers are able to interject discussions on values, character, responsibility, and the importance of helping others.

Jacksonville, Florida. With its Youth Intervention Program, officers from the Jacksonville sheriff's office meet informally after school with young men ages 12 to 18 from low-income, gang-plagued neighborhoods. The emphasis is on talking and listening, with the officers working as mentors to strengthen the young men's self-esteem, increase their awareness of the consequences of violence, and provide informal guidance on a range of safety and health topics. The program also provides vocational training, with several community business partners creating work opportunities for the participants.

These examples illustrate that police and other criminal justice professionals have an important role to play in community-based violence prevention, in essence by restoring and helping sustain community life. As these and other programs continue to evolve, it is essential that they link up with indigenous coalitions, which must take the lead in improving neighborhood conditions.

Mass Media Campaigns

Police and other criminal justice officials can also take an active role in creating mass media campaigns against violence. For example, the Minnesota Crime Prevention Officers Association (MCPOA) organized a campaign called Turn Off the Violence, in part to raise parents' awareness of what their children watch and hear in the entertainment media. Using a variety of public relations strategies, the association asked people not to watch or listen to violent entertainment media for a single designated day, October 3, 1991. Leading up to the target date, the association distributed information packets to promote the campaign. During the preceding week, crime prevention, DARE, and juvenile officers gave antiviolence presentations to students.

The Continuing Challenge

During their RCCP "peace lesson," Jett Ritorto's fifth-graders at P.S. 321 discuss their worries about violence.

"We hear gunshots in our neighborhood," reports one boy. "I heard somebody's mother just got shot," adds another.

Their anxiety is plainly seen. They talk excitedly, forgetting to raise their hands. Many of the students fret about next year's transition to junior high, their alarm fed by news

reports of students being shot at school. "It's a jungle out there," a girl concludes.

"What makes our school different?" Ritorto asks. "Do we have a lot of fights in this school?"

"Yes," a boy responds, "but here we don't carry on too much, not like in the real world. Here, we know each other."

* * *

The real world—with that simple cliché, this young boy has touched on one of the key questions about RCCP and other violence prevention programs: Can students use these conflict resolution lessons in the outside world, where the ethic of the streets supports not win-win solutions to conflict but the rightness of power?

Some students will find it impossible to apply what they have learned, due to the circumstances in which they live. But many others are emboldened to try, and that is an important first step. In fact, when they do try, many students are surprised by the success they have.

RCCP's leadership is realistic enough to know that this type of program is only part of what needs to be done. Linda Lantieri has written:

> Sometimes when people get excited about a new idea, they tend to see it as a panacea. . . . Violence has many sources, among them drugs, poverty, and racism. Conflict resolution can help, but will be most effective as part of a larger strategy.[5]

Programs such as RCCP may be only a part of what needs to be done, but they are an essential part. We need to change social norms in the United States, so that violence is truly viewed as a last resort and people instinctively search for creative, nonviolent solutions to conflict. RCCP, with its focus on creating the "peaceable school," has shown us how to begin.

For Further Information

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Houston Area Exchange Club
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Notes

1. Linda Lantieri is now director of the RCCP National Center, located in New York City.

2. This and other vignettes were adapted from *Peace—It Means the World to Us: Real Moments in the Lives of Participants in the Resolving Conflict Creatively Program* (New York: Educators for Social Responsibility, 1992).

3. Roger Fisher and William Ury, *Getting to Yes: Negotiating Agreement Without Giving In* (Boston: Houghton Mifflein, 1981).

4. RCCP notes, however, that a high school metal detector, with the personnel needed to operate it, costs approximately $100,000 per year.

5. Linda Lantieri, "An Eye for an Eye Makes the Whole World Blind," *UFT Bulletin* (October 28, 1991): 19.

About This Study

This document was written by William DeJong, Ph.D., a lecturer at the Harvard School of Public Health. DeJong is also the author of *Violence Prevention: An Overview of School, Community, and Media Programs*, which is part of NIJ's *Issues and Practices* series.

Cover photo courtesy of Peter Barton. Pictured are student mediators giving each party in a conflict the chance to be heard without interruption.

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